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Ian C. Willis

University of Wollongong, iwillis@uow.edu.au

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Flood free crossing via Macarthur Bridge

Abstract

One of the most important pieces of economic and social infrastructure in the Macarthur area is the Macarthur Bridge. The bridge is also one of the most significant pieces of engineering heritage in the Camden local government area. It provides a highlevel flood free crossing of the Nepean River which can isolate the township of Camden when the numerous low-level bridges in the area are flooded - the Cowpasture Bridge (Camden), the Cobbitty Bridge and the Menangle Bridge.

Keywords

Macarthur Bridge, transport, Nepean River, engineering heritage

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Flood free crossing via Macarthur Bridge

By Dr Ian Willis

One of the most important pieces of economic and social infrastructure in the Macarthur area is the Macarthur Bridge. The bridge is also one of the most significant pieces of engineering heritage in the Camden local government area. It provides a high-level flood free crossing of the Nepean River which can isolate the township of Camden when the numerous low-level bridges in the area are flooded - the Cowpasture Bridge (Camden), the Cobbitty Bridge and the Menangle Bridge.



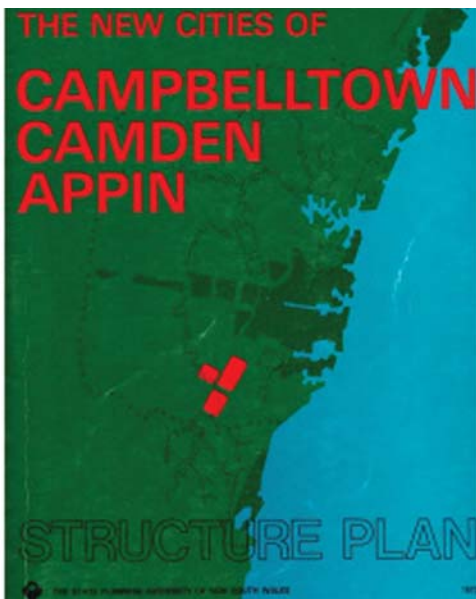
Macarthur Bridge View from Nepean River Floodplain 2015 (I. Willis)

The impressive bridge is named after one of the Camden district's first land grantees John Macarthur and their pastoral holding of Camden Park, which the family still occupy. There are many descendants of the Macarthur family in the Camden district. The naming of the bridge also coincided with the establishment of the Macarthur Growth Centre at Campbelltown by the Askin Liberal Government in 1973 and support from the new Whitlam federal government for the Macarthur Growth Region. These were originally part of the 1968 Sydney Region Outline Plan from which the 1973 New Cities Structure Plan for Campbelltown, Camden and Appin appeared. These were exciting plans that were developed at the time with the provision of extensive infrastructure across the new growth centre. Some of the infrastructure eventuated and many parts did not. The New Cities Plan turned into a developers' dream and hastened Sydney's urban sprawl into the southern reaches of the Cumberland Plan. The Macarthur Region is one of those legacies.

The Macarthur bridge guaranteed flood free access from the Burragorang coalfields to the Main Southern Railway at Glenlee for American shipping magnate Daniel Ludwig's Clutha Development Corporation. This was particularly important given the defeat of the Askin Liberal government's support for a proposal by Clutha for a rail link between the Burragorang coalfields and the Illawarra coastline.

The Askin government passed special enabling legislation and the issue turned into one of the first environmental disputes in the Sydney basin in the early 1970s.

The high level Macarthur Bridge allowed the diversion of coal trucks from the Burragorang Valley coalfields away from Camden's main street passing across the low-level Cowpasture Bridge from 1973. Coal trucks then travelled along Druitt Lane and over the Macarthur Bridge to the Glenlee Washery at Spring Farm. The flooding by the Nepean River of the road access to the township of Camden



The New Cities Plan 1973

at the low-level Cowpasture Bridge has been a perennial problem since the town's foundation in 1840.



Cowpasture Nepean River Road Rail Bridge 1900
Postcard Camden Images

In 2002 the NSW Minister for Transport replied to a question from Dr Elizabeth Kernohan, then member for Camden, about the bridge. The Minister stated:

"I am advised that Macarthur Bridge was built in the early 1970's on the basis that most of the long distance traffic would use the F5. I am advised that the primary function of the Macarthur Bridge was for use as a flood relief route. It was built parallel to the Cowpasture Bridge at Camden to take the full traffic load when the Cowpasture Bridge is impassable."

I am advised by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) that the bridge referred to was not specifically designed to be widened at a later date. (NSW Parliament, 8 May 2002)"

Specifications - Macarthur Bridge has a 26-span, 3380 feet (approximately 1.12 km) long concrete structure that carries the Camden Bypass across the Nepean River and its flood plain. The bridge was built between 1971 and 1973, originally to carry Hume Highway traffic, on a flood-free alignment around Camden.



Macarthur Bridge Northern Approaches from Camden Bypass 2015 (I. Willis)

The Camden Bypass is the former Hume Highway alignment between the localities of Cross Roads and Camden.

It is marked as State Route 89. The proper route is from the CrossRoads, skirting Camden via the Camden Bypass and ending at Remembrance Drive, another part of the former Hume Highway near Camden South.

The Camden Bypass was in turn bypassed in December 1980 when the section of what was then called the South Western Freeway (route F5) from Campbelltown to Yerrinbool was opened.

It has grown in importance as a major arterial road linking the Hume Motorway, WestLink M7 and M5 South Western Motorway interchange at Prestons, near Liverpool, with Camden.

The official plaque of Macarthur Bridge states:

The bridge was designed by the staff of the Department of Main Roads and is the longest structure built by the Department since its inception in 1925. Length (Overall) 3380 feet comprising 26 spans each of 130 feet long. Width between kerbs 30 feet with one footway 5 feet wide. Piled foundations (max 90 feet deep) were constructed by the Department's Bridge construction organisation. Piers and superstructure by contract by John Holland (Constructions) Pty Ltd. Total cost of bridge £2,600,000.

RJS Thomas Commissioner for Main Roads, AF Schmidts Assistant Commissioner for Main Roads, GV Fawkner Engineer-in-Chief, FC Cook Engineer (Bridges), Department of Main Roads, New South Wales

Open to traffic on 26 March 1973.

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